

WILLINGHAM
BUCKINGHAM
LEIALOHA

THE GOOD PRINCE

VERTIGO

F A B L E S

66



Dec 07
suggested for
mature readers
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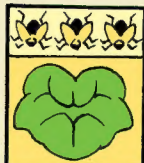
THE IMPERIAL CITY—CAPITAL OF GEPPETTO'S EMPIRE IN THE HOMELANDS.

MIGHTY EMPEROR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE IMPERIAL COURT; ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.



EMPIRE

Chapter Six of
The Good Prince



THE EMPEROR'S THRONE ROOM.

I'M THE GHOST OF LANCELOT OF THE LAKE, FORMER KNIGHT OF THE ROUND TABLE, AND NOW OFFICIAL ENVOY TO YOUR AUGUST COURT, FROM THE NEW KINGDOM OF HAVEN.

I HAVE THE SINGULAR HONOR TO REPRESENT ITS UNCONTESTED RULER, THE MOST NOBLE KING AMBROSE THE FIRST.

WHO IS THIS WHO APPEARS SUDDENLY AMONG US?

THIS INTRUSION IS AN OUTRAGE!

In which a new kingdom is formed in the very heart of Empire and an army is dispatched to destroy it.

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KILL THIS CREATURE WHO HAS THE TEMERITY TO INTERRUPT OUR IMPORTANT MATTERS OF STATE.

BY ALL MEANS DO TRY.



IT'S PROBABLY BEST TO GET SUCH NONSENSICAL MATTERS OUT OF THE WAY, SO THAT WE MAY THEN PROCEED TO THE HEART OF OUR BUSINESS TOGETHER.



DON'T SIMPLY CONTENT YOURSELVES WITH USELESS SLASHING AT ME WITH COLD STEEL, GENTLEMEN.

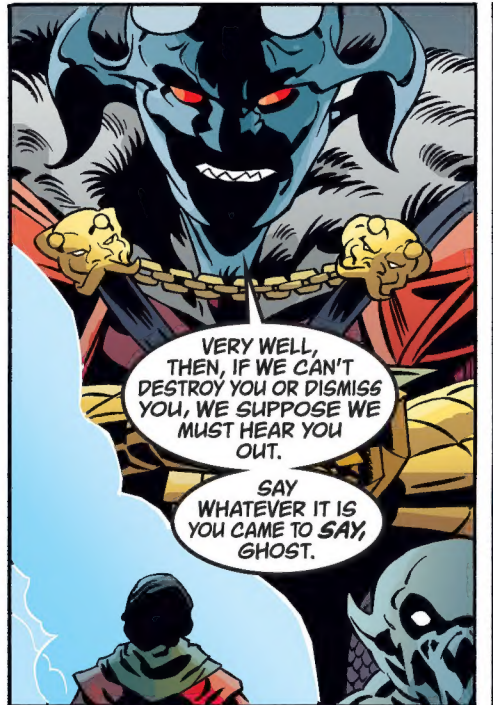
IF THERE ARE ANY SORCERERS AMONG YOU, I INVITE YOU TO TRY **BLASTING** ME WITH SUCH DIVERSE FELL CURSES AND SPELLS AS YOU CAN THINK TO ATTEMPT.



YES, LIKE SO.



AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO HARM ME, FOR I'M ALREADY **LONG** DEAD.



VERY WELL, THEN, IF WE CAN'T DESTROY YOU OR DISMISS YOU, WE SUPPOSE WE MUST HEAR YOU OUT.

SAY WHATEVER IT IS YOU CAME TO SAY, GHOST.



AS I SAID, *BEFORE* THE MARTIAL ANTICS, I'M THE SELECT ENVOY FROM THE KINGDOM OF HAVEN.

IN THIS FIRST MEETING, OUR MESSAGE TO THE EMPIRE IS SIMPLE ENOUGH. IN A NUTSHELL, I'M HERE TO INFORM YOU THAT WE **EXIST**.



ANY QUESTIONS?



AND AT THE NEW KINGDOM OF HAVEN...

THANKS MOSTLY TO THE LEADERSHIP OF WEYLAND SMITH, WE'VE MADE QUICK PROGRESS TRANSFORMING THIS RUINED AND OVER-GROWN LAND BACK INTO A LIVABLE PLACE.

SO, I THINK IT'S TIME TO START INVITING OTHERS TO MOVE HERE.

I WANT YOU TO FAN OUT, FLYING ALL THROUGHOUT THE LANDS OF THIS WORLD, SPREADING THE NEWS THAT ALL WHO WISH TO FIND **SANCTUARY** AWAY FROM THE EMPIRE ARE INVITED TO LIVE HERE INSTEAD.

CAUTION ALL THAT I WON'T BE ABLE TO **PROTECT** THEM ON THEIR WAY HERE, BUT ONCE THEY DO ARRIVE, THEY'LL BE SAFE FROM THE EMPEROR AND HIS ARMIES FOREVER AFTER.

YOU'LL TURN GHOSTLY AGAIN, SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING MY LANDS, SO NOTHING WILL BE ABLE TO HARM YOU. BUT ALL WHO YOU WISH TO WILL BE ABLE TO SEE AND HEAR YOU.

SO GO, PLEASE, MY FRIENDS. FIND THOSE WHO WANT TO LIVE HERE IN PEACE. GUIDE THEM BACK TO HAVEN AND SCOUT THE WAY FOR THEM, AVOIDING WHAT DANGERS YOU CAN.



I'M ASTONISHED AT THE PROGRESS WE'VE MADE IN SO SHORT A TIME.

WE, BRIDE KILLER? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HELP?

OKAY, "THE PROGRESS *THEY*'VE MADE," THEN.



"LOOK AT THEM. MR. WEB SPINS ENDLESS STREAMS OF SILK, AND WE'VE CLOTH FOR OUR TENTS AND CLOTHES AND ANYTHING ELSE THAT OCCURS TO US TO WANT.



"BUT WE'VE NO LOOMS ON WHICH TO WEAVE IT, SO OVERNIGHT WEYLAND SMITH CONSTRUCTS THEM, ALONG WITH EVERY OTHER TOOL WE NEED.



"SAWS TO CLEAR THE FOREST AND PLOWS TO TILL THE SOIL. HOW DOES HE DO IT AND *STILL* HAVE SO MANY HOURS TO OVERSEE THE BUILDING AND PLANTING?"



YOU SOUND AS IF YOU ADMIRE THE MAN, BLUE-BEARD.

I DO. I ADMIRE EXCELLENCE WHEREVER IT'S FOUND. I'LL HAVE TO DEVISE SOME WAY TO KEEP SMITH AROUND AND *SEDUCE* HIM INTO MY SERVICE, ONCE I TAKE OVER.



ONCE YOU TAKE OVER?



OF COURSE. YOU'VE NO SKILLS IN ADMINISTERING A KINGDOM, SO I'LL HAVE TO ASSUME THE CROWN BY NECESSITY, ONCE THE *BLOOD-LETTING* IS DONE.

BUT DON'T WORRY, SHERE KHAN. THERE'LL ALWAYS BE A PLACE FOR YOU IN MY NEW REGIME.



EVERY KING NEEDS A GOOD *KILLER* ON HIS STAFF. THAT'S HOW KINGDOMS ARE KEPT.

COME WITH ME, *IMAGINARY KING*. THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD SEE, BEFORE YOU START MAKING *TOO* MANY PLANS.

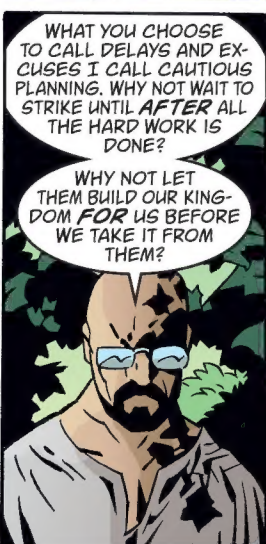


WHAT IS IT? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING OF IMPORTANCE HERE.

EXCEPT OUR SAFE REMOVE FROM PRYING EYES AND EARS. I'M GROWING EVER MORE *DISAPPOINTED* IN YOU WITH EACH PASSING DAY, BLUEBEARD.



YOU KEEP FINDING EXCUSES *NOT* TO ACT, TO PUT OFF OUR BETRAYAL, TO DELAY KILLING.



WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO CALL DELAYS AND EXCUSES I CALL CAUTIOUS PLANNING. WHY NOT WAIT TO STRIKE UNTIL *AFTER* ALL THE HARD WORK IS DONE?

WHY NOT LET THEM BUILD OUR KINGDOM *FOR* US BEFORE WE TAKE IT FROM THEM?



YOU'VE SHOWN YOURSELF TO BE NOTHING BUT A PAPER TIGER, WHILE I'M A REAL ONE--

--OF THE MAN-EATING VARIETY!

BUT--!



YEEEAH-AHHH!!



AND IT'S TOO LONG SINCE I'VE HAD THE MEAT OF A FRESH KILL IN MY BELLY.





LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE **DONE**, YOU IMBECILE! I'M A **GHOST** AGAIN! YOU'VE **RUINED** EVERYTHING!

DON'T DISTURB ME WHILE I'M EATING.



STOP THAT, YOU DISGUSTING THING!



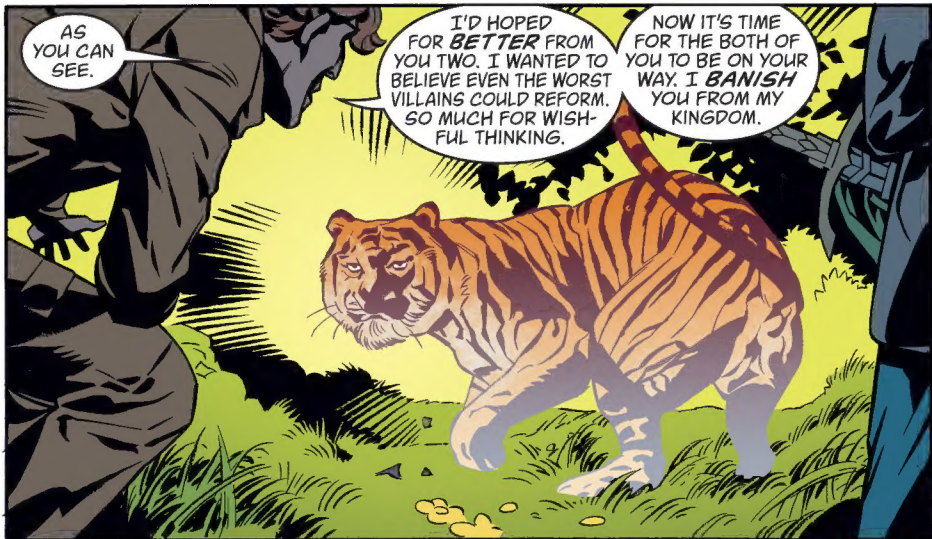
OUR SIMPLETON KING?

KILL YOU, TOO!



HOW CAN YOU IMAGINE **HARMING** ME WHEN YOU'RE MERELY AN INSUBSTANTIAL SPIRIT?

THE FLESH AND BONE YOU ENJOYED WAS MY **GIFT**, WHICH I CAN WITHDRAW AT WILL.



AS YOU CAN SEE.

I'D HOPED FOR **BETTER** FROM YOU TWO. I WANTED TO BELIEVE EVEN THE WORST VILLAINS COULD REFORM. SO MUCH FOR WISHFUL THINKING.

NOW IT'S TIME FOR THE BOTH OF YOU TO BE ON YOUR WAY. I **BANISH** YOU FROM MY KINGDOM.



BUT I DIDN'T **DO** ANYTHING!

OH? DID YOU THINK I WAS **IGNORANT** OF YOUR PLANS?

GO ON.



OFF WITH YOU, NOW.



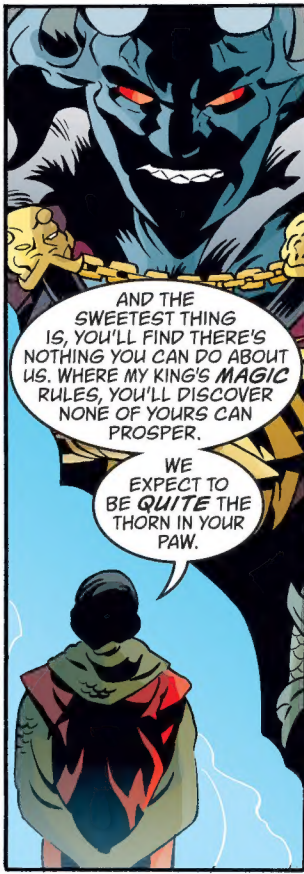
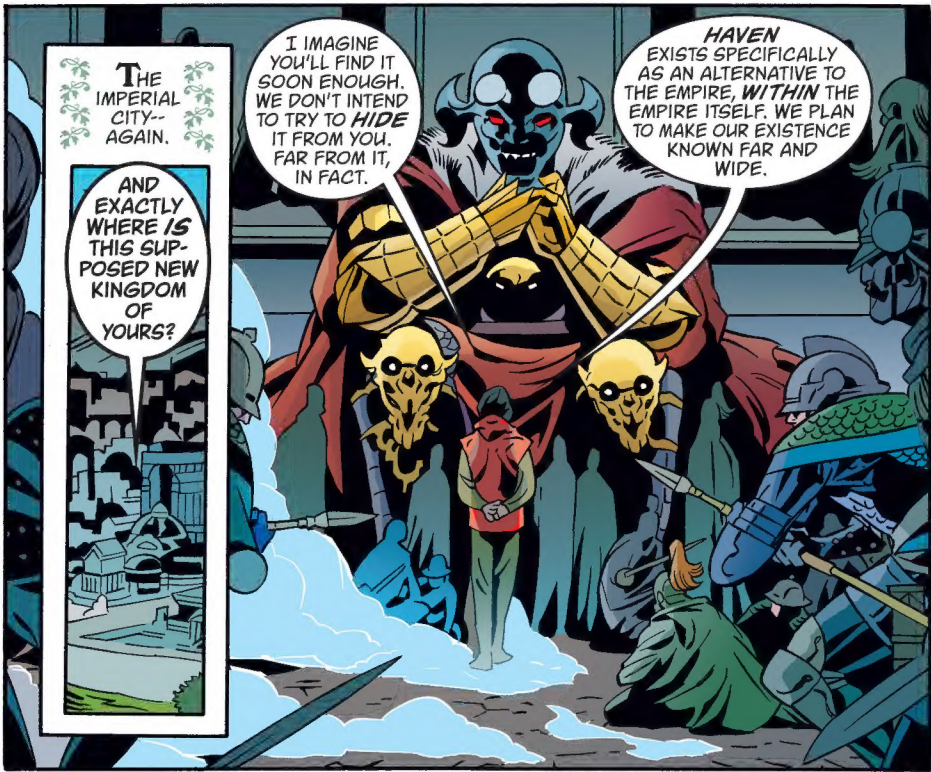
WAS IT WISE TO LET THEM GO, PRINCE AMBROSE?

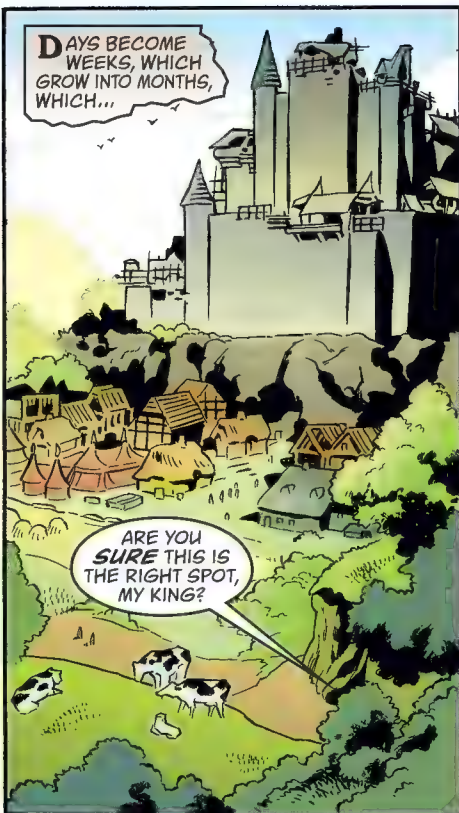
UH, I MEAN **KING**.



OF COURSE, TRUSTY JOHN. WHO ELSE CAN I COUNT ON TO FAITHFULLY GUIDE THE EMPIRE'S ARMIES BACK HERE TO DESTROY US?









OOPS! I'M SORRY. I SHOULDN'T BE CALLING YOU *FLY* ANYMORE. IT'S KING AMBROSE NOW.

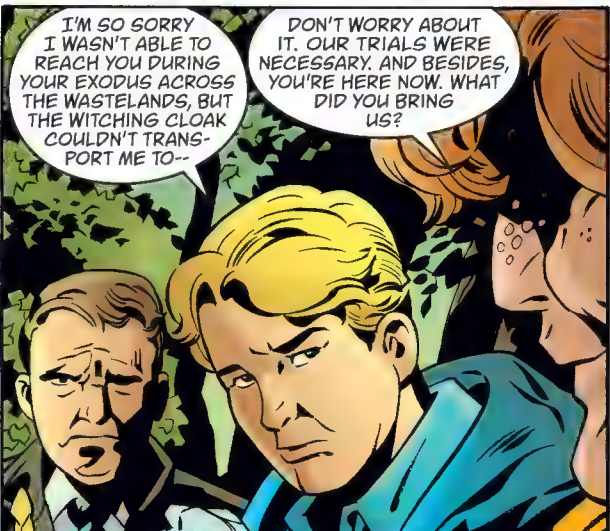
DON'T YOU DARE TRY BENDING A KNEE TO ME, BLUE. FOR YOU IT WILL *ALWAYS* BE JUST *FLY*.



YOU REMEMBER MY SQUIRE, TRUSTY JOHN?

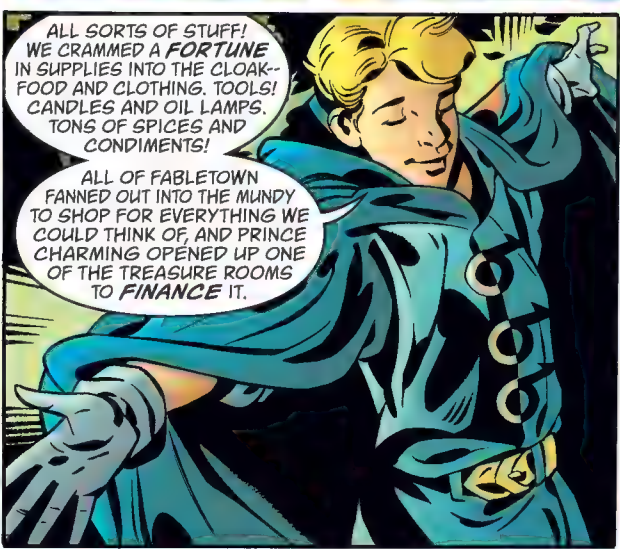
OF COURSE. IT'S BEEN TOO LONG, JOHN.

SUCH A JOY TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BLUE.



I'M SO SORRY I WASN'T ABLE TO REACH YOU DURING YOUR EXODUS ACROSS THE WASTELANDS, BUT THE WITCHING CLOAK COULDN'T TRANSPORT ME TO--

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. OUR TRIALS WERE NECESSARY. AND BESIDES, YOU'RE HERE NOW. WHAT DID YOU BRING US?



ALL SORTS OF STUFF! WE CRAMMED A *FORTUNE* IN SUPPLIES INTO THE CLOAK-- FOOD AND CLOTHING. TOOLS! CANDLES AND OIL LAMPS. TONS OF SPICES AND CONDIMENTS!

ALL OF FABLETOWN FANNED OUT INTO THE MUNDY TO SHOP FOR EVERYTHING WE COULD THINK OF, AND PRINCE CHARMING OPENED UP ONE OF THE TREASURE ROOMS TO *FINANCE* IT.



LORD BLESS *ALL* OF YOU!

HELP ME UNLOAD THIS LOOT. IT'LL TAKE A WHILE.





LATER...

...AND FERTILIZERS, AND SEEDS FOR PLANTING, AND BOOKS--OH, HOW I'VE MISSED MY MYSTERIES TO READ!

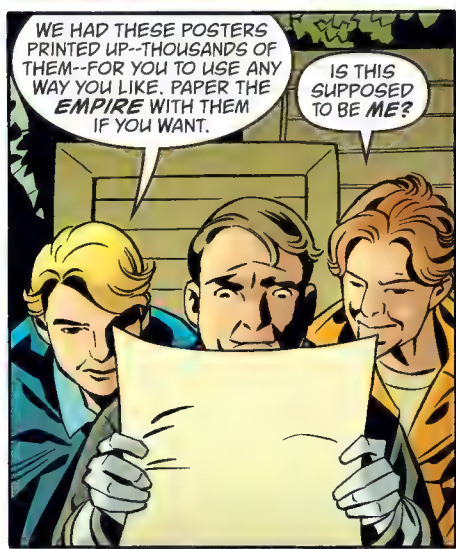
I'M EXHAUSTED, BLUE. HOW COULD ONE CLOAK HOLD SO MUCH?

I HAVE NO IDEA, BUT EVEN WITH ALL THIS IT WASN'T FILLED. MAYBE THERE IS NO LIMIT TO WHAT THE WITCHING CLOAK CAN CARRY.



AND WHAT'S THIS? PRINTED PAGES?

OH YES, I MEANT TO MENTION THAT. PRINCE CHARMING HAD AN IDEA.



WE HAD THESE POSTERS PRINTED UP--THOUSANDS OF THEM--FOR YOU TO USE ANY WAY YOU LIKE. PAPER THE EMPIRE WITH THEM IF YOU WANT.

IS THIS SUPPOSED TO BE ME?





PRETTY GOOD LIKENESS, DON'T YOU THINK?

THE DRAGON YOU'RE KILLING REPRESENTS THE EMPIRE, OF COURSE.



MEANING I'M MORE POWERFUL THAN THE EMPIRE?

CLASSIC PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE. EVEN WITHOUT LABELS, EVERYONE WILL GET THE GIST OF IT--

--NO MATTER WHAT LANGUAGE THEY SPEAK ON WHICH IMPERIAL WORLD.



AND OUR ALLIES IN THE CLOUD KINGDOMS ARE WILLING TO DROP THESE OVER EVERY WORLD IN THEIR BLOODY EMPIRE. PRINTED INSURRECTION FLUTTERING LIKE SNOW-FALL DOWN FROM THE SKY.

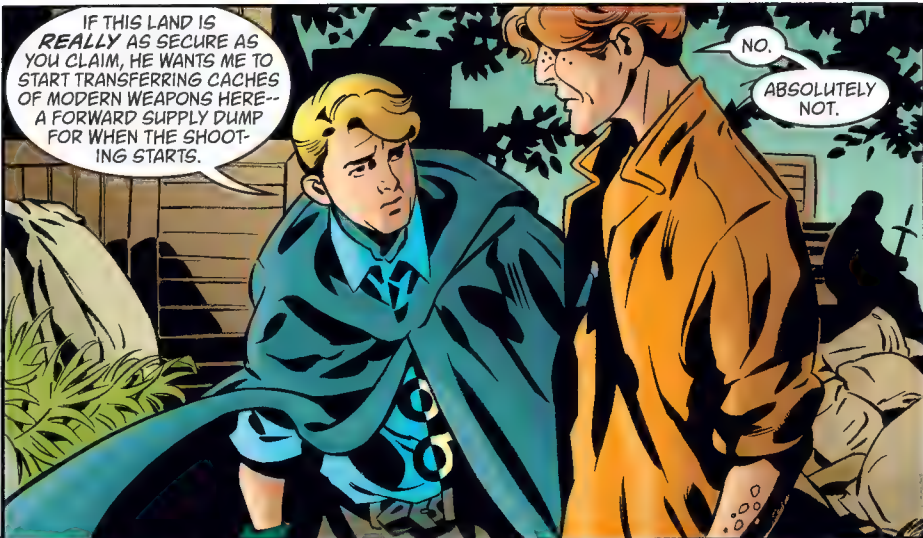
THIS WILL SCORCH OLD GEPPETTO'S PANTIES FOR DAMN SURE!



WELL, I WANTED TO PICK A FIGHT WITH THE EMPEROR, SO THIS WILL CERTAINLY HELP DO IT.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, I HAVE ONE MORE PRIVATE MESSAGE FROM PRINCE CHARMING.





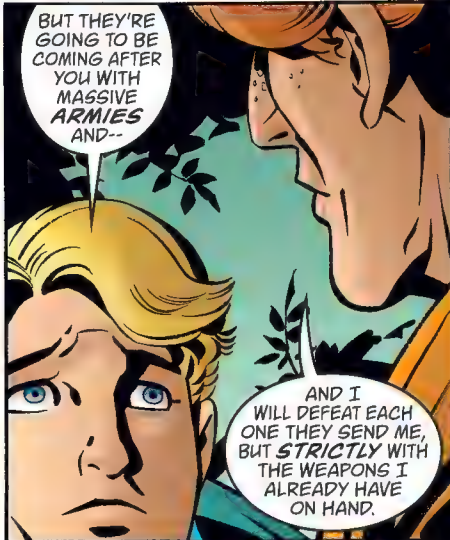
IF THIS LAND IS **REALLY** AS SECURE AS YOU CLAIM, HE WANTS ME TO START TRANSFERRING CACHES OF MODERN WEAPONS HERE-- A FORWARD SUPPLY DUMP FOR WHEN THE SHOOTING STARTS.

NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT.



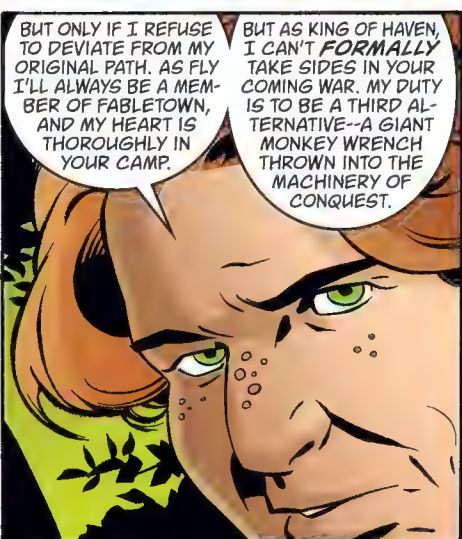
WHAT?

I CAN'T LET YOU STASH WEAPONS HERE. THE MAGIC THAT LETS ME RULE HERE IS A **FRAGILE** CONSTRUCT. IT WON'T ABIDE TOO MUCH FIDDLING OUTSIDE OF WHAT I'VE ALREADY SET IN MOTION.



BUT THEY'RE GOING TO BE COMING AFTER YOU WITH **MASSIVE ARMIES** AND--

AND I WILL DEFEAT EACH ONE THEY SEND ME, BUT **STRICTLY** WITH THE WEAPONS I ALREADY HAVE ON HAND.



BUT ONLY IF I REFUSE TO DEVIATE FROM MY ORIGINAL PATH. AS FLY I'LL ALWAYS BE A MEMBER OF FABLETOWN, AND MY HEART IS THOROUGHLY IN YOUR CAMP.

BUT AS KING OF HAVEN, I CAN'T **FORMALLY** TAKE SIDES IN YOUR COMING WAR. MY DUTY IS TO BE A THIRD ALTERNATIVE--A GIANT MONKEY WRENCH THROWN INTO THE MACHINERY OF CONQUEST.

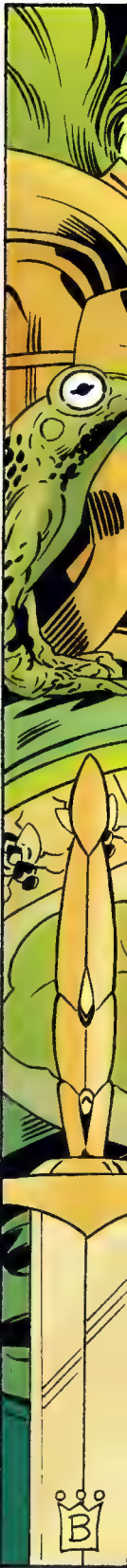
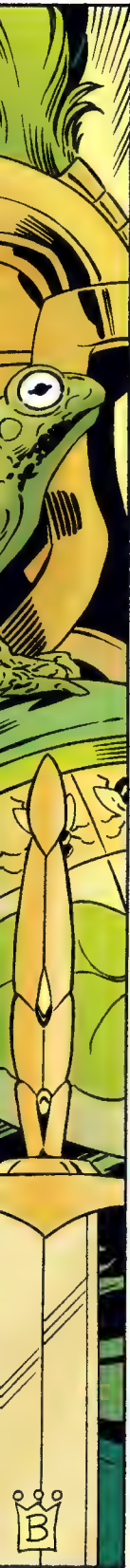


BUT DON'T THINK I'M ABANDONING YOU, BLUE.

BY THE TIME YOUR WAR STARTS, THEY'LL HAVE FRUITLESSLY WASTED SO MUCH EFFORT AND MANPOWER AGAINST ME THAT THEY'LL HAVE PRECIOUS LITTLE LEFT TO SPEND ON YOU.

THAT'S MY GIFT TO FABLETOWN. BE SURE TO MAKE GOOD USE OF IT.





"HUGE!!"

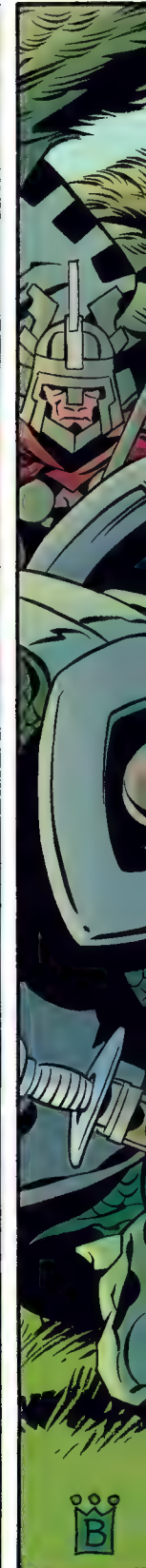
THIS WAY, GENERAL HILDEBRAND. JUST OVER THIS NEXT RISE OF HILLS.

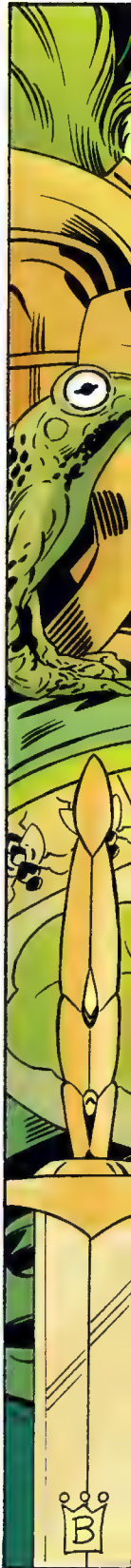
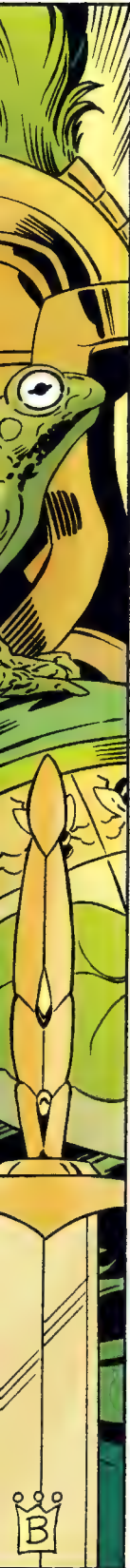
AS SOON AS THE FIGHTING'S DONE AND I'VE PUT THIS UPSTART KING OF YOURS TO THE SWORD.

JUST REMEMBER OUR DEAL, SOLDIER. YOUR WARLOCKS WILL RESTORE REAL FLESH, BLOOD AND BONE TO US.

NO! BEFOREHAND! I'VE DESIGNS TO JOIN IN ON THE KILLING.

AND HE'S NO KING OF MINE-- THOUGH PRECIOUS LORD BRIDEKILLER HERE SEEMED TO LIKE THE INBRED IMBECILE WELL ENOUGH.







NOW LET'S GO SEE IF WE CAN GET THIS WAR **STARTED**, JOHN.

RIGHT BEHIND YOU, SIR.



AND WORLDS AWAY AT THAT MOMENT...

IT'S BEGUN.



BE CAREFUL NOW, CHILD.



EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU DO AND SAY NEXT.





THAT ARMY!
IT'S--THERE MUST BE
THOUSANDS!

TENS OF
THOUSANDS AT
LEAST.

AND MORE
ARRIVING EVERY
MINUTE.

CAN'T
YOU GO HELP
HIM, BLUE? THE
WITCHING
CLOAK?

NO. FLY
ORDERED ME TO STAY
AWAY, AT LEAST UNTIL THE
FIRST BATTLE WAS DECIDED
ONE WAY OR THE
OTHER.

FIRST
BATTLE?

NEXT:
WAR!



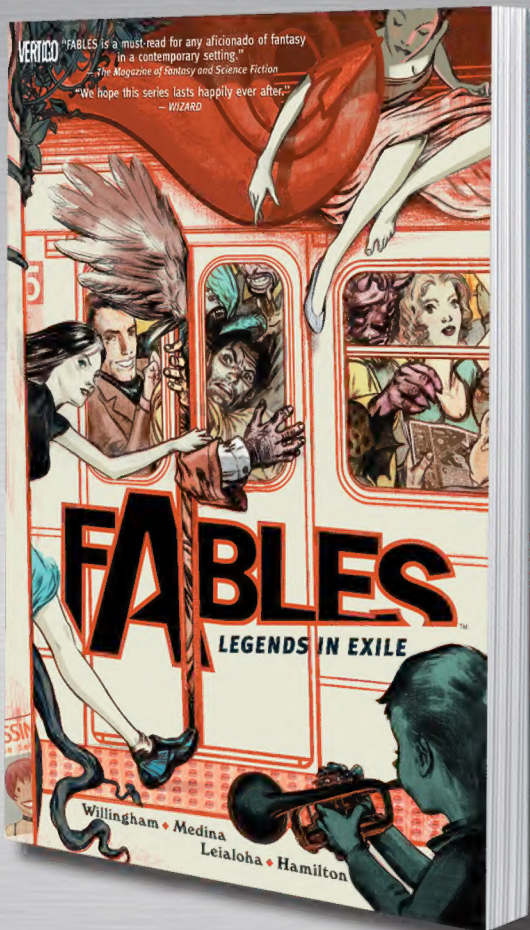
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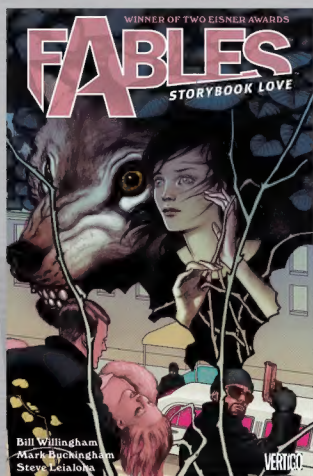
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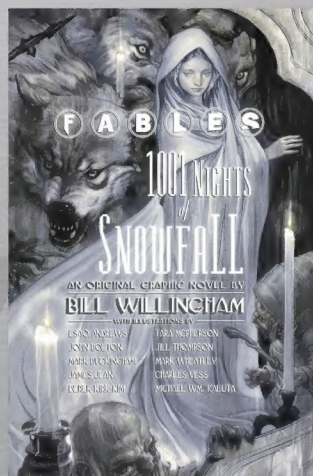
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